

NEWS RELEASE

Alabama Department of Public Safety

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DPS REVISES DRIVER LICENSE PHOTOGRAPH POLICY

MONTGOMERY — The Department of Public Safety has revised its policy regulating photographs taken for driver license and nondriver identification cards to permit certain types of head coverings for religious or medical reasons, according to Public Safety Director Col. W.M. Coppage. The previous policy did not permit any head coverings in these photographs.

The new policy, effective Monday, Feb. 23, requires a “full-face” photograph that clearly identifies the subject. According to the policy, “Head coverings and headgear are only acceptable due to religious beliefs and medical conditions, and even then, may not obscure any portion of the applicant’s face.”

“The Department of Public Safety is sensitive to the needs and concerns of those driver license applicants who wear head coverings for religious reasons or medical conditions,” Coppage said. “Following review by Public Safety’s Legal Unit and Driver License Division, the policy was changed to allow these applicants to wear certain head coverings as long as the full-face requirement is met and a positive identification may be made.”

Coppage said this new policy would maintain the integrity of the driver license system, while respecting religious requirements and customs. The new policy is based on standards outlined in the U.S. Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual. A copy of the policy is attached.

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PROPOSED PROMULGATED RULE

The photograph of each applicant must be a "full face" photo. A "full face" photo is one in which the applicant is facing the camera directly. The applicant should not be looking down or to either side and the face should cover approximately 50 percent of the area of the photo. Although variations in hairstyles and head covering make it difficult to rigorously define the term "face" in general, the head of the applicant shall be shown from the top of the forehead to the bottom of the chin and from hairline side-to-side. The key requirement is that the photograph clearly identifies the applicant.

Head coverings and headgear are only acceptable due to religious beliefs or medical conditions, and even then, may not obscure any portion of the applicant's face. Sunglasses or other paraphernalia, which detract from the face, as defined above are not acceptable unless required for medical reasons (e.g. an eye patch). Photographs of applicants wearing headgear not specifically religious in nature are not acceptable. A photograph shall not be taken depicting a person wearing a traditional facemask or veil that does not permit positive identification.

Medical exemptions to this policy must be documented by a signed statement from a licensed physician in Alabama clearly stating the medical condition.

At no time will an applicant be photographed when it appears that they are purposely altering their appearance in a way that would misrepresent their identity.